

The Role of Women from a Protestant and Catholic Perspective in the 1950s (1954/1958)

Abstract

In the 1950s, both the Protestant and Catholic churches criticized the trend toward women's participation in the workforce. They continued to see women in their traditional role as wife and mother.

Source

I.

The voices from the ranks of working women remind us not only of an omission. They also reveal that women's participation in the workforce, as such, is not unproblematic, that it carries an inherent tension that needs to be endured time and again. Anyone who does not see this will scarcely have a proper understanding of the special kind of life task of a woman in a job. This is not meant as any kind of judgment about the aptitude and life accomplishment of a working woman; the point is merely to arrive at a sober recognition of the preconditions under which she accomplishes her achievements. And that undoubtedly includes – among important other things – this as well: a woman is created body and soul to become the companion of a man and the mother of children – that is simply a matter of fact. Along with the purely physiological fact, this also encompasses a psychological one: compared to the man, the woman – aside from those exceptions that always exist – has precisely those qualities and abilities on which the child depends, lest it suffer harm in its physical and mental development. Empathic understanding, a propensity to care for and nurse the helpless, a quick grasp of what is most immediately needed in human terms – all such special “womanly” abilities are simultaneously a clear indication of the task destined for the woman: life as a wife and mother. [...]

Source: H. Greven, ed., *Die Frau im Beruf*, in cooperation with Lydia Präger and Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt on behalf of the Protestant Academy. Hamburg, 1954, p. 13 f; reprinted in A. Kuhn and D. Schubert, eds., *Frauenalltag und Frauenbewegung im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 4. Frankfurt, 1980, p. 62 f.

II.

The care for the home, in which the woman is queen, forms the center and the place of her primary activity. But in the current order of things, industry, with its enormous advances, has brought about an unparalleled change. It has compelled a large number of women to leave the domestic hearth and to do their work in factories, offices, and stores. What is your duty, under these circumstances? See to it, today more than ever, that the family is the sanctuary of your life.

The goal of work on behalf of women's issues in public life is to protect the dignity of girls, wives, and mothers, to preserve home and hearth and child in accordance with their original place among the overall tasks of women.

The fate of the family, the fate of the human community is at stake. It is in your hands. Every woman, without exception, has the obligation – the strict duty of conscience, mind you – not to remain on the sidelines, but to act.

Source: “Papst Pius XII. zu den Aufgaben der Frau”, in *Frau und Mutter, Monatsschrift für die katholische Frau in Familie und Beruf*, no. 12 (1958), p. 194; reprinted in A. Kuhn and D. Schubert, eds., *Frauenalltag und Frauenbewegung im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 4. Frankfurt, 1980, p. 62 f.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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